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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION, FEBRUARY 4-8: HEZBOLLAH PRISONER SWAP; IRAQI TRANSITION TO SELF-RULE; SIGNING OF TIFA; HALLIBURTON; MAJOR NON-NATO ALLY STATUS FOR KUWAIT

[11](#). SUMMARY: The February 7 signing of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) by US and Kuwaiti officials received prominent coverage, focusing on the economic benefits to be gained by Kuwait through the agreement. Also on the news pages, a number of MPs are requesting discussion of the "Halliburton portfolio" in the February 9 session of the National Assembly.

The dean of Kuwait's College of Shariah Law is reported to have issued a statement vigorously opposing political rights for Kuwait women as inconsistent with Islamic law. The report contradicts earlier statements by Kuwait's Minister of Awqaf (Islamic affairs) suggesting that the country's religious establishment might support such reforms.

A prominent liberal writer states that if US troops leave Iraq too soon, the country "will be thrown into turmoil," and that Arab countries must assist Iraq "in shouldering the historic responsibility" of transitioning to self-rule.

A number of prominent conservative writers have hailed the Hezbollah prisoner exchange as a victory for Hezbollah and validation of the organization's violent tactics. One writer views the prisoner exchange and Sharon's proposal to remove Israeli settlers from Gaza as cynical political maneuvering, while another believes the proposed evacuation of Gaza is a "positive step. if Sharon translates words into deeds." END SUMMARY.

[12](#). News stories: The signing of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) between the US and Kuwait in Washington DC received front page coverage in both Al-Qabas and Al-Watan on February 8. Al-Watan carried a quote by Secretary of Commerce Zoellick stating, "Kuwait is a real

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friend." Al-Rai Al-Aam reports that Minister of Trade and Industry Abdullah Al-Taweel said the signing of the TIFA will "boost Kuwait's economy."

Al-Qabas reports that MP Ahmad Al-Saadoun announced his intent, along with other MPs, to request a discussion in the National Assembly tomorrow on the "Halliburton portfolio." According to Al-Saadoun, the "Halliburton portfolio" has turned into "one of the sides of a triangle of corruption."

The Dean of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Kuwait University, Dr. Mohammed Al-Tabtabaei, announced that it was not "religiously legitimate" for women to participate in National Assembly elections, either through voting or running for office, Al-Anba reports on its February 7 front page.

Al-Qabas reports on February 8 that "government sources" state that the issue of redrawing electoral constituencies in Kuwait "is not a priority." The National Assembly is reported to be "optimistic" over the possibility of changing the constituencies.

All papers report this week on rumors of an upcoming reshuffling of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) involving three ministers. According to Al-Qabas, one of the ministers involved would be the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, Mohammed Deifallah Sharar.

President of the American University of Kuwait, Dr. Shafeeq Al-Ghabra, said the new private university "seeks to graduate students capable of expressing themselves and working independently," according to Al-Qabas.

Editorials:

[13](#). "Arab Deterioration and Independent Power"
Dr. Shafiq Al-Ghabra wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (2/7): "Developments throughout the Arab world foretell

that the situation in Palestine and Iraq will steadily deteriorate. The situation will not improve unless Arab countries adopt economic and political reforms. If US troops in Iraq leave prematurely, then Iraq will be thrown in turmoil, violence and fear. Therefore, the right course of action is for the Arab countries to assist the Iraqis in shouldering their historic responsibility."

14. "Hezbollah: A Model"

Former MP Dr. Abdel-Mohsen Jamal wrote in independent Al-Qabas (2/4): "With great efficiency, Hezbollah was able to impose a new political formula on the Zionists. In the eyes of the Arabs and the whole world, Hezbollah has become a model for how to handle a ferocious enemy that has no respect for the Arab. This ability will impel the Zionists into further caution. Hezbollah's leader, Nasrallah, has become a symbol of successful leadership. Hezbollah's success [has]. proved the validity of the concept of resistance."

15. "Suspect Deal and Evading the Peace Process"

Ghazi Al-Jassem wrote in independent Al-Qabas (2/8): "Ariel Sharon is similar to Saddam Hussein, because no one can predict his next move. Governed by our emotions, and inebriated with the sense of victory, we did not take stock of the real meaning behind Israel's release of the Lebanese and Palestinian detainees. In fact, we have failed on the strategic level. [D]espite a respite in Palestinian suicide actions that only harm the Palestinians, Sharon did not proceed with the peace process. He is a man of war, not peace. Today, Sharon is proposing to evacuate the Gaza settlements, but it is only a new maneuver before meeting President Bush."

16. "Withdraw and Build Your Wall"

Dr. Ayed Al-Manaa wrote in independent Al-Watan (2/7): "The relocation of Jewish settlements from Gaza, which will eventually end the Israeli occupation is good news, according to Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei. It is a significant measure, because it will positively affect the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Sharon's proposal may ease hostility between the two sides, although this may not apply to the religious and nationalistic extremists on both sides. For peace to succeed, Sharon's words must be translated into deeds."

17. "My Concern is the Umma [Islamic Nation], Not America"

[Conservative Islamist] Salafi Salem Al-Nashi wrote in independent Al-Watan (2/8): "American cultural hegemony over the Islamic world is obvious. Everyone is aware that Western culture is enveloping the world, but this hegemony incorporates the inclusion of Kuwait as a [major] non-NATO strategic ally. [C]ondemning and vilifying America will not benefit the Umma [Islamic Nation]."

18. "Eliminating Terrorism"

Mohammed Musaed Al-Saleh wrote in independent Al-Qabas (2/8): "Almost two and a half years after the events of 9/11 and since President Bush announced his campaign against terrorism, it is clear that terrorist activities have increased globally. Meanwhile, Israel has exploited the situation by labeling those who carry out the Intifada as terrorists while Sharon, the corrupt terrorist who will be carrying the votes of American Jews, will be welcomed by Bush [in Washington DC]. Terrorism will not cease unless America changes its foreign policy and stops its policy of double standards. The reason behind terrorism is the feeling among oppressed people that the greatest country in the world does not care to eliminate the injustice they are suffering."

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